

North East case study for Heritage Counts 2015

Region:	North East
Theme demonstrated by case study:	Community involvement in recording heritage at risk
Name of project/group:	Northumberland National Park Authority
Lead contact:	Robert Doughty, Heritage at Risk Volunteer and Programme Co-ordinator
Location:	Northumberland National Park

Short description of project:

Since April 2011, volunteers have been systematically assessing and recording the condition of a number of ancient monuments in Northumberland National Park. Over 300 monuments have been assessed so far and the results have fed into Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register where appropriate.

The initial project was established by Northumberland National Park Authority and Historic England who supported training for volunteers on how to identify, assess and record threats to these important archaeological sites.

A volunteer steering group has since continued the project, which continues to attract new volunteers. New volunteers are allocated a buddy from the original volunteer group who shows them what to do. The focus of the on-going programme is to review trends in the condition of monuments across the Park over time and to monitor the effectiveness of any conservation work that's been undertaken on those monuments.

This sits well with the wider work of the Authority, which aims to promote opportunities for volunteers to take part in practical conservation programmes.

Why did you get involved with this project or activity?

I was a member of the original survey project and I now help to coordinate the volunteer steering group for the on-going project.

How did you resource your project or activity?

The original project was funded by Northumberland National Park Authority with grant aid from Historic England and the Institute for Archaeologists. Volunteers were drawn from the National Park Volunteer Service, especially the Voluntary Rangers scheme. Training was also given to members of local community groups to enable them to assess scheduled ancient monuments in their local area. Additional publicity from a project website and promotional leaflet also assisted the recruitment of volunteers.

What would have happened without your project or activity?

The data gathered by the volunteers is used to inform monument management by the National Park Authority, Historic England and through Countryside Stewardship Schemes. It provides an up-to-date record on the state of this aspect of the National Park's heritage. Such a comprehensive dataset would not have been possible to resource otherwise.



Volunteers in action © Northumberland National Park Authority

What difference been made by your project or activity?

Since 2011, 123 volunteers have taken part in this project, 300 ancient monuments have been assessed and practical conservation works carried out to reduce the total number of monuments at risk in the National Park by 5%. The project was highly commended by the 2012 UK National Parks Volunteer Awards.

The Heritage at Risk programme is a great way to be involved in the local landscape and make a difference for future generations, to survey interesting sites, often in out of the way places, and help with their preservation.

What have you learnt from this experience?

At a time when resources are scarce, the contribution of volunteers is used in a meaningful way to support the work of heritage professionals. The volunteer steering group provides regular feedback to heritage professionals operating within the Park and this has proven a useful means of promoting good communication within the Park and helping with the smooth running of the project.

What does the future hold for your project or activity?

The approach fits well with the National Park Authority's core purpose. Further opportunities will be offered for volunteers to engage with this on-going survey, in addition to opportunities for practical site conservation.

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